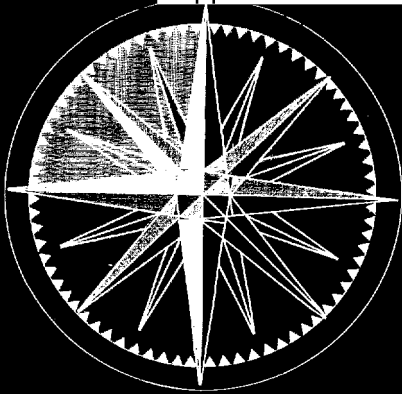


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# CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SPECIAL REPORT

COMMUNIST CONTROL OF PANAMANIAN STUDENT GROUPS

State Dept. review  
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## COMMUNIST CONTROL OF PANAMANIAN STUDENT GROUPS

Student rioting in Colon in June brought out sharply the power of students as a pressure group in Panama. The disturbances were a direct protest against a supposed action of the secret police and showed a willingness to lock horns with the Robles administration. They posed the most serious challenge yet to its ability to maintain order. The no-holds-barred toughness of the national guard in suppressing the riots left a taste of vengeance with the students.

The students are easily manipulated by dedicated and well-organized Communists at the University of Panama.

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The Panamanian public, in the period since the January 1964 riots involving the Canal Zone, has shown some concern over the degree of Communist infiltration of student groups and the educational establishment. Public displeasure over student disorders, however, is far from strong enough at this time to reduce student pressure on the government. Moreover the canal and the US presence are strong nationalistic issues which touch all Panamanians and which the Communists can exploit to win sympathy from large segments of the population for their antigovernment demonstrations.

### Students as a Communist Target

The student movement has been a prime target of the Communists since the 1930s and has been successfully and substantially penetrated. Communist influence is especially manifest at the University of Panama and at several important public secondary schools,

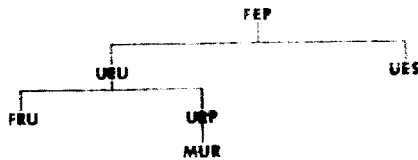
particularly the National Institute in Panama City. These provide bases of operation for a small but efficient Communist minority.

There are a number of factors which account for the vulnerability of the university and secondary school students. They

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## COMMUNIST-DOMINATED STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN PANAMA



### FEP - Federation of Panamanian Students

The largest student organization in Panama and parent body of the UEU and the UES. The FEP is controlled by Moscow-oriented Communists. Although the FEP claims to represent approximately 38,000 students, it does not exercise control over the entire membership.

Secretary General: Luis Navas, member of the FRU and the People's Party (PdP), Panama's Communist party.

### UEU - Union of University Students

Student organization at the University of Panama. The UEU is dominated by Moscow-oriented Communists. Its membership is approximately 9,000.

Secretary General: Ascanio Villalaz, member of the FRU and the PdP.

### UES - Union of Secondary Students

Moscow-oriented secondary-student organization. Its membership is approximately 29,000. The UES is mainly a paper organization.

### FRU - University Reform Front

Moscow-oriented Communist student front at the University of Panama. The FRU maintains control of the UEU Directorate, the Administrative Board, and the University General Council--the three most important governing bodies at the University of Panama. The FRU has an estimated 1,000 members and sympathizers.

Leader: Victor Avila, PdP national youth secretary.

### URP - Panamanian Revolutionary Union

Parent organization of the revolutionary Chinese-oriented MUR.

### MUR - Reform Unity Movement

The URP branch at the University of Panama. It is a hard-line Communist group with a small membership (60-100 members and sympathizers). The MUR is currently splintered into pro-Chinese and pro-Cuban factions.

Leaders: Alvaro Menendez Franco, Floyd Britton, Carlos Garcia Martin, Jose Modesto Herrera, Federico Britton, and Porfirio Batista.

are mainly from discontented social groups, since those who can afford it generally attend private institutions or schools abroad. The increased number of Panamanians with higher education has not been matched by a corresponding increase in professional opportunities. This introduces an element of frustration to those seeking to improve their lot by learning.

The inadequacy of the plant at the University of Panama has generated legitimate complaint and serious student unrest. Designed to accommodate 3,000, the university has approximately 7,500 enrolled on campus and another 2,500 taking extension courses. Another frequently voiced complaint is the academic deficiency of certain professors.

Certain aspects of the university's legal prerogatives and administrative practices also make the campus attractive for Communist exploitation. The university's privileged legal position and the tradition of university autonomy have kept the government from intervening directly in its management and have hamstrung police investigations of student violence. With autonomy preventing police from entering the campus, the university is an arrest-free sanctuary for all students, and an untouchable haven for Communist agitators.

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Possibly of even greater importance is the tradition of "co-government" which grants the students a large voice in the university's administration. This arrangement has made it possible for the Communists, by dominating student organizations, to gain significant influence in the management of the university itself.

### Instruments of Control

The Communists work through the Federation of Panamanian Students (FEP), the Union of University Students (UEU), and the Union of Secondary Students (UES). The FEP is the parent organization encompassing the other two, which have been controlled by Communist student groups since 1962. Leaders of the UES, which is composed of student associations in all public secondary schools, are easily dominated by their counterparts in the UEU, which includes all university students who do not specifically disassociate themselves from it. The Communists have gained control of these organizations through their purposeful pursuit of leadership posts, unity of action, timely exploitation of political opportunities at the school, and lack of effective competition. As a result of their alert opportunism Communist-controlled forces have established themselves as spearheads of reform at the university.

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The UEU is dominated by the Moscow-oriented University Reform Front (FRU), which in 1962 as a newly organized group swept student elections throughout the university and recaptured the UEU for the leftists after a two-year loss. Their margin of victory in student elections has again declined in the past two years, thanks to increasing determination on the part of non-Communist groups and to the splintering of the Communist forces into hard- and soft-line elements. The rate of gain by democratic groups, however, may not be rapid enough to prevent full exploitation of an increasingly unstable situation at the university. Past history has amply demonstrated the alarming rapidity with which any disorder can be blown into a major national crisis or be extended into violent anti-Americanism.

Student elections at the university in January 1966 resulted in election of FRU candidates for 46 of 93 contested offices. The remaining offices are split between two antagonistic groups, the Christian Democratic Students and the Independent Democratic Front. Because these two are unable to get together, FRU is able to control. As a result of the election, the FRU has six of the eight student seats on the University Administrative Board, the school's highest governing body. The cowed university administration actually helped the FRU in its victory, since it accepted two FRU slates for elections in the individual faculties after the close of registration. It also

voided the election of two winning Christian Democratic candidates.

### Extension of Influence

Communists are able to use their credentials as student leaders to participate in the activities of other pressure groups and to represent Panama at Communist-sponsored and other international student conventions. Leftist student leaders have repeatedly intimidated politicians, demanded and received audiences with Panamanian ministers and presidents, and occasionally had a direct impact on government policy. The influence of Communist student leaders extends to nonpolitical (sports, social, cultural) groups at the school, and they have access to some university funds.

University officials and much of the faculty are easily influenced by student troublemakers and are readily susceptible to UEU pressure. Through the co-government system, the UEU is able to control the appointment of individual professors and the election of university officials, including the rector. The FRU supported the election of the present rector

and the US Embassy has reported it has reason to believe he gives the UEU and FRU moral and financial assistance.

### Dissension Among Communists

A division in national Communist ranks extends to the Communists at the university. A split in the Communist leadership began in 1964 as the result of

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both personal and tactical differences between advocates of the "hard" and "soft" approach to achieving power.

Advocates of the soft line are in the larger and stronger FRU, the branch within the university of Panama's Moscow-oriented Communist Party (PdP). (Indicating the priority given the university by the PdP, the party also has a special committee for university affairs.) The hard line within the university student groups is represented by a small but violent and principally Chinese-trained and -oriented group, the Reform Unity Movement (MUR), which is the political arm of the Panamanian Revolutionary Union (URP). The URP is a revolutionary body, which, though small, may be the best qualified organization in Panama for effecting armed insurrection.

The two Communist groups at the university, FRU and MUR, have spent a good deal of their energy fighting one another, which has weakened their control of the student body. Their use of the campus as a battleground for their rivalries as well as a headquarters for subversion has lost them much of the respect they formerly had. Their recourse to weapons and violence has instilled fear among the students.

Despite their differences, the Communist groups have shelved their antagonisms in the past--as in the June disorders--to cooperate on an exploitable issue and will do the same in the future.

### Foreign Influences

Communists at the university apparently play a role in selecting students for study in Communist countries. In January 1965 a Panama City tabloid carried an article written by the FEP offering three scholarships for graduate study in the USSR. This was the first time such an offer had been openly publicized. The non-Communist Independent Democratic Front has charged that the FRU held an open meeting on 11 March to choose recipients for Soviet scholarships. The front claimed that Marxist penetration in the university has gone so far that the extremists now feel no need to hide their subversive activities.

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### Panamenista Support?

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In spite of Arias' personal dislike for the Communists, his political pragmatism has on occasion led him to collaborate with them. The PP has contacts even within the hard-line URP. The only mass-based political group in the country, PP can command widespread support for an issue it espouses and chooses to popularize. Should the PP grant its full backing to a student issue, there is little doubt that the Robles government would be unable to withstand the force of the combined pressure.

The coincidence of interest in antigovernment activity between Communist students and the PP could mean serious trouble for Panama over the next few months. Arias remains convinced that he was cheated out of the presidency in the 1964 elections and has an overriding desire to sabotage the Robles administration. Arias has reiterated that he and his followers will oppose any canal settlement because of

the "illegality" of the Robles regime.

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Not only do old issues remain ripe for exploitation, but there is a new fuse which can be ignited. The students' attitude against authority has been hardened by firm, repressive action against them on the part of the national guard and secret police, and even by an act of President Robles himself. During student demonstrations this past May, commemorating 1958 student-police clashes, demonstrators stoned the presidential palace and hit a visiting Costa Rican official. Infuriated, President Robles ordered the activation of an electric fence around the palace, which jolted several students. One student was injured by a tear gas grenade. The desire for vengeance among the students makes the situation at the school more explosive than before, and most observers anticipate more disorder during the summer.

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